



**DELIVERED BY:** Dr. Richard Breitmeyer, California State Veterinarian  
Dr. Annette Whiteford, Director of Animal Health and Food Safety  
**EVENT:** California Joint Legislative Committee  
Emergency Services and Homeland Security  
**DATE:** Friday, March 17, 2006  
**TIME:** 9:00am – 12:00pm  
**LENGTH:** 15-20 minutes  
**PLACE:** State Capitol, Room 4203

---

### **DR. RICHARD BREITMEYER**

- Thank you Chairperson Kehoe, Vice Chair Nava and committee members. We are very pleased to be here this morning representing our state's agricultural industry and animal producers.
- Dr. Annette Whiteford, CDFA Director of Animal Health and Food Safety Services, as well as John Dyer, CDFA Chief Counsel, join me here today.
- We are all veterans of the 2003 Exotic Newcastle Disease Task Force, the largest animal disease eradication effort in the U.S. in three decades.
- Dr. Whiteford will present in a few moments. Mr. Dyer is the draftsman of our intervention authority and implementing regulations. He will stand by for questions, if any.  
.....
- The specter of bird flu pandemic among people has raised fear around the world, but it is an epidemic of avian influenza among poultry that is rapidly moving toward California.
- It is coming along the flyways of migratory birds, but the most likely connector between human and pathogen is poultry.
- Poultry are also the most appropriate place to take our stand against the spread of this illness to humans.
- The good news is we have the experience, the responsibility and the authority to respond to any incursions of AI in poultry. Many of the key responders during the 2003 exotic Newcastle disease outbreak still work for the California Department of Food and Agriculture.
- Numerous countries and states have already concluded that the 2003 outbreak furnishes the best model for planning an AI response, including Virginia, the UK, Canada, China, Oregon and USDA.

- Food and Agricultural Code section 9562 requires the State Veterinarian to intercede and, together with its implementing regulations, provides a framework within which to proceed.
- I'd like to begin with a brief overview of the global epidemic of the Asian strain of H5N1 avian influenza (AI).
  - Circulating in Asia since 1996.
  - Rapid spread in avian species since 2003.
  - About 100 human deaths – intimate contact with infected poultry (50 percent mortality rate!)
  - Concern from public health community that this virus could become a human pandemic.
    - Emphasize that while this is possible, today this IS AN AVIAN EPIDMIC unlike any we have seen before!
  - Now more than 40 countries are affected in Asia, Europe and Africa (show map).
  - Spread is now both by wild waterfowl, human movement of birds and contaminated materials.
- Why this virus is different from other AI viruses.
  - Able to cause disease in humans.
  - Has developed the ability to jump between species – wild waterfowl to poultry and back, more avian species affected than normal with unprecedented lethality; also felines, others.
  - We have never seen an AI outbreak this widespread – now across three continents; normally confined to a single region.
- While we must plan for the possibility of a pandemic, we must recognize that TODAY we DO HAVE an avian epidemic that threatens California and the U.S.
  - It is very likely that this virus will soon reach California.
    - Migrating waterfowl.
    - Smuggled poultry or birds.
    - Accidental introduction from contaminated products – foreign visitors.
  - Many credible sources are now predicting that the virus may reach the U.S. this fall or possibly next spring.
    - WHO, OIE, Sec. Chertoff from DHS.
    - CDFA and UCD avian experts.
- There is a tremendous amount of fear, anxiety, and unfortunately, misinformation, associated with AI. We must all work together to make sure that both the media and public have the correct information.
- Surveillance (or testing) for AI has increased dramatically over the last year.
  - In veterinary medicine, we classify AI viruses by their ability to cause disease in poultry
    - “High path” viruses cause severe disease and high mortality, such as the H5N1 strain that is now circulating the globe.
    - “Low path” viruses generally cause little or no disease.

- “Low path” AI viruses are quite common and will be found frequently in poultry and wild birds.
- Once detected, we have the ability to quickly determine if they could be a dangerous strain.
- The media and public should expect this and not over-react when these “routine” or “low path” AI viruses are detected – it shows that our surveillance systems are working.
- For discussion, now let’s assume that this “high path” H5N1 is first detected in California in an avian species – still NOT a pandemic virus to people, still just a disease of birds.
  - It could be detected in wild waterfowl, backyard poultry and commercial poultry.
  - I will let our wildlife experts cover their area, and I will focus on detection in domestic poultry – either commercial or backyard.
  - And there are two key areas I want to address:
    - Risks to the public’s health in general.
    - Food safety concerns.
- Public health
  - Remember this is still primarily a poultry disease.
  - While there has been some transmission to people in other countries, it has been through very intimate contact with poultry.
  - So the general public is not in danger as long as this virus has not acquired the ability to be transmitted from person to person (the definition of a pandemic strain).
  - However, if backyard poultry owners become aware of sick or dying birds, we ask them to tell us or their veterinarian immediately so we can rule out AI.
    - They should take basic precautions, using disposable gloves and washing their hands with soap and water after coming in contact with birds, manure or other materials.
    - This is one way we need the media and public to assist us in monitoring backyard poultry for any suspicious symptoms of AI.
    - But remember, as long as the virus remains a poultry disease, the public in general is not at risk.
- Food safety
  - Commercial producers practice biosecurity to protect their birds from diseases such as AI; that is, they isolate their flocks from people, vehicles, equipment and other birds that may carry a disease agent.
  - Commercial producers also have very good surveillance systems and test their birds regularly for AI.
  - This virus will not hide in a commercial flock.
    - Serious disease and up to 100 percent mortal.
    - So we will know immediately if a flock is infected and any surviving birds will be humanely euthanized.
  - Also, as a final safeguard, all poultry is inspected before and after slaughter so diseased birds cannot enter the food chain.

- One final point to remember: The best way to prevent this virus from becoming a pandemic strain is to immediately detect it and remove it from avian populations, so it does not have the opportunity to mutate to a more dangerous strain.
  - For this reason, the Governor has requested additional emergency response resources, which if approved, will assist our department in meeting our responsibility as the lead agency responding to emergency animal diseases.
- I would now like to hand our presentation over to Dr. Annette Whiteford, she will:
  - Review our response strategies.
  - Relate some of our experiences with the eradication of END from Southern California in 2002-03, a very good model to predict how an AI virus would affect poultry in California today.

### **DR. ANNETTE WHITEFORD**

- Thank you Chairperson Kehoe, Vice Chair Nava and committee members...
- Review of our response strategies...
  - Response begins with prevention and early detection.
  - As Dr. Breitmeyer mentioned, private veterinarians, poultry producers, university experts, USDA and CDFA are collaborating to provide protective biosecurity barriers that separate domestic poultry from wild birds.
  - Even the best system of biosecurity is not perfect, for this reason we are testing birds so that we can act quickly to eliminate high path AI from domestic flocks.
  - We have conducted, and continue to refine, studies of domestic poultry movement and interaction within California so we can target testing and maximize our understanding of disease status of the entire domestic flock.
  - If disease is detected in a domestic flock, the infected flock will be quarantined and destroyed.
  - CDFA epidemiologists will initiate disease investigation in order to determine the extent of the outbreak.
  - Localized or regional quarantines may be placed to stop the movement of any potentially infected birds or materials.
  - Affected facilities and equipment will be cleaned and disinfected.
  - Because more than one agency will likely be involved, primarily due to human health and carcass disposal concerns, CDFA will respond using the Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) that will include unified command.
    - CDFA will lead the response to the avian disease in unified command with USDA and the lead federal agency.
    - OES will direct and coordinate other state resources that will be used to support the response.
    - The California Department of Health Services will lead the response addressing human health issues, and depending on the circumstances of the outbreak, will be a part of the unified command or otherwise be integrated using SEMS standards.
    - (DHS is lead when the event is primarily a human health emergency.)

- In 2002-03, USDA and CDFA responded to an outbreak of exotic Newcastle disease (END) in poultry, and there are lessons to be learned from that experience.
  - Similar to AI, END is a virus that spreads rapidly in birds. Unlike H5N1 AI, END does not have serious human health impacts.
  - Within the past 30 years, the 2002-03 outbreak was the largest health emergency response in the U.S. The outbreak started and primarily circulated in backyard flocks in semi-urban, culturally diverse communities in the greater LA area. It involved:
    - Nine counties in Southern California and extensions into four other states.
    - 7,000 people from 10 state and federal agencies.
    - 19,000 locations.
    - And, destruction of more than 3 million birds.
  - What did we learn?
    - California's system to coordinate resources from multiple agencies works! (USDA, CDFA, CDF, OES, CHP, CalEPA, local law, ag commissioners, tribal nations)
    - New technologies are critical for disease control strategy development and tactical implementation (i.e., who goes where). Systems include geo-spatial mapping and data layering, resource deployment and task tracking, rapid laboratory diagnostics (explain).
    - Government control strategies will not work unless citizens understand and reinforce them (biosecurity, movement, reporting).
    - Accurate and timely situational reports are critical but challenging: Information management and reporting needs to be in place and practiced ahead of time.
    - When acting quickly, keeping all stakeholders (city, county, citizens, media, business, legislature) informed is a challenge – important role for OES.
    - Messages for the media and public must be coordinated, transparent and consistent – the media demand for information must be filled or the void gets filled with rumor and misinformation – labor intensive!
    - Disease spreads exponentially so finding it early is critical – know where to look and provide ongoing resources.
    - Once discovered, action must be swift and constant. The military concept of “overwhelming forces” should be applied. Those impacted cannot afford debate over strategy and funding. Delayed action will have severe consequences due to the often-unseen spread of the disease.
  - The human health threat carried with a H5N1 AI outbreak in poultry will complicate control, largely due to worker protection issues and public anxiety.
- Again, we feel it's very important to recognize that the Governor has requested additional emergency response resources, which if approved, will assist our department in meeting our responsibility as the lead agency responding to emergency animal diseases.